

Message Text

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43

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SF

SUBJ: SAG COMPLAINT OVER USIS RELEASE ON TERRORISM ACT

1. FOREIGN MINISTER MULLER CALLED ME TO HIS OFFICE THIS MORNING TO PROTEST USIS DISTRIBUTION OF A WIRELESS FILE ITEM (AF-22, SEPT 23, 1975) COVERING A NEWS CONFERENCE HELD US CONGRESSMEN AND LAWYERS REPRESENTING THE LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW ON RECENT DETENTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA UNDER THE TERRORISM ACT. MULLER DESCRIBED THE ITEM VARIOUSLY AS UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, AID AND COMFORT TO INTERNAL ENEMIES OF THE REPUBLIC, AND AN UNFRIENDLY ACT SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. THE SPONSORS OF THE NEWS CONFERENCE, HE CONTINUED, WERE "WELL KNOWN ENEMIES" OF SOUTH AFRICA. HE ATTEMPTED TO BUTTRESS HIS CASE BY QUOTING EXTENSIVELY FROM A RECENT ISSUE OF NEWSWEEK DESCRIBING OPPOSITION TO SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN BOSTON AND KNOXVILLE AND ASKING HOW THE USG WOULD LIKE IT IF THE SA INFORMATION SERVICE WERE TO PUT OUT MATERIAL SAYING THAT WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE IN THOSE CITIES CONSTITUTED A GROSS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

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WM I OBSERVED TO THE MINISTER THAT HIS COMMENTS

REFLECTED A DIFFERENT APPROACH FROM THAT OF MY GOVERNMENT TO THE QUESTION OF INFORMATION DISSEMINATION. USIA, THROUGH THE VOA AND ITS NEWS SERVICE, DISTRIBUTED DAILY ON A WORLD-WIDE BASIS FACTUAL NEWS WHICH IT REGARDS AS OF GENERAL INTEREST. THE ITEM ON THE PRESS CONFERENCE IN QUESTION WAS NOT TARGETED AT SOUTH AFRICA BUT PART OF THE DAILY NEWS OUTPUT SENT TO ALL POSTS. I TOLD HIM THAT I DID NOT THINK IT FAIR TO DESCRIBE THOSE PARTICIPATING IN THE CONFERENCE AS "ENEMIES" OF SOUTH AFRICA, NOTING IN PARTICULAR THE OBJECTIVITY OF SENATOR CLARK WITH WHOM HE HAD RECENTLY MET. (MULLER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD FOUND CLARK TO BE FRANK AND BALANCED.) WITH REGARD TO HIS REFERENCES TO BOSTON AND KNOXVILLE, I NOTED THAT I WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE USG WOULD NOT TAKE OFFENSE IF THE SA INFORMATION SERVICE WERE TO PUBLISH IN WASHINGTON STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT CRITICIZING THOSE WHO OPPOSE SCHOOL INTEGRATION OR OTHERWISE COMMENTING ON OUR EFFORTS TO INSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES. IN CLOSING, I TOLD THE FOREIGN MINISTER I APPRECIATED HIS BRINGING HIS GOVERNMENT'S DISPLEASURE WITH RELEASE OF THE NEWS ITEM TO MY ATTENTION AND THAT I WOULD INFORM MY GOVERNMENT OF THOSE VIEWS.

3. COMMENT: AS FAR AS THE EMBASSY IS AWARE, THIS IS THE FIRST FORMAL COMPLAINT ABOUT USIS OUTPUT IN A VERY LONG TIME. I UNDERSTAND THAT IN TIMES PAST THE SAG HAS VOOCED OBJECTIONS AT THE WORKING LEVEL TO CERTAIN USIS ITEMS COMMENTING ON DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA. WHY THEY CHOSE TO ESCALATE THE REPRESENTATION ON THIS ONE IS NOT CLEAR, PARTICULARLY WHEN AMPLE COVERAGE OF THE NEWS CONFERENCE WAS PUBLISHED BY THE LOCAL PRESS BASED ON DISPATCHES FILED BY THEIR OWN CORRESPONDENTS. IT MAY REFLECT INCREASED SENSITIVITY TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM OF THE LATEST ROUND OF TERRORISM ACT DETENTIONS COUPLED WITH UNEASE OVER THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PANORAMA AS REFLECTED IN THE NEWCASTLE DISTURBANCES. BOWDLER

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